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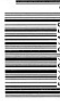
UNLEASHED!

**GIANT-
SIZED
ACTION!**



DIRECT EDITION

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**PLUS: AN
ADVENTURE
OF
HOKUM
AND
HEX!**

NIGHT... AND THE ALLEYWAYS
OF LOS ANGELES COME TO
LIFE UNDER A GOLD, UN-
FEELING MOON...

...IT'S LIGHT REVEALING
THE FORMS OF FOUR
TEENAGE HEROES...

...THE DIGITIZED
DATAMASTER
CALLED AMOKK...

AMOKK WAS
CORRECT! THIS
FIGHT'S GOTTEN
OUT OF HAND!

...THE HINDRENDING
MISTRESS KODNY
AS BLISS...

HERE'S
WHERE ALL
THAT POWER
PRACTICE
PAYS
OFF!

IT'S TIME
WE TOOK BACK
THE NIGHT,
HEROES!

...THE Frenzied
Freak Of Noise
NAMED AMOKK...

...AND THEIR BROTHERLY
LEADER... THE HIGHLY
WARRIOR ARMATA!

BUT AS ARMATA'S FISTS BLAZE WITH
ENERGY... SOMEONE'S TIGHT KICKING
MAY MEAN THE END OF HER HEROISM...

EYOH! LET'S SHOW
THESE GUNGLASS
SOME REAL
STREET
VIOLENCE!

HYPERKIND NO MORE

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DO 'EM!
DO 'EM
ALL!

YOU
BLOODTHIRSTY
SONOVA--
--THE
FARABOS
ARE JUST
KIDS!

OLD
ENOUGH
T' CROSS THE
DEACON, OLD
ENOUGH
T' DIE FOR
IT!

AMOKK
TAKE OUT AS
MUCH
HARDWARE
AS YOU
CAN!

OHMIG--
ONE OF DEACON'S
GANGSTAS TOOK
THE HIT MEANT
FOR ME!

JUST
WOTHER DEAD
LOSER. LET
'EM KILL EACH
OTHER!

WE CAN
ONLY DODGE
BULLETS
SO LONG
BEFORE--

I... I
KILLED
HIM...

SLASH

CLICK!

WAB-AM

MIKE HALBIEB
WITH
DAN SCHAEFFER
INKS

STEVE ENTEN
LETTERS
ELAINE LEE
COLORS

MARC MALABRIN
MALCOLM SMITH
CARL POTTS
TOM D'AMALGO

EDITS
CONSULTING EDITS
EXECUTIVE EDITS
CHIEF EDITS

ANOKK, THERE
IS NO POINT TO
ARGUMENT--

--THIS AVENUE
OF ESCAPE IS
THE MOST
LOGICAL
ALTERNATIVE!

MAN, WHAT
KINDA GAME
IS THIS? FIRST
THE GANGSTAS
TRY TO 'JACK
US WITH
GUNS--

--THEN SOME
KINDA SUPER
HEROES COME
TO OUR
RESCUE?

THIS IS
NO GAME--
NON GO!

"...FIRST YOU, THEN YOU'RE
SLANT-EYED HONEY,
GEORGE 'POWER'
YOU'RE HISTORY!"

"TH- THEY'RE TALKIN' ABOUT
ME! THAT DELIVERY I
MADE WITH CARLOS, WHEN
THE HOODS STOLE THE
PRODUCT--

--WE WERE IDIOTS
TO GET MIXED
UP WITH THAT--

--I BARELY
GOT US OUTTA
THERE ALIVE!
THOUGHT IT WAS
OVER-- AND
NOW--

--I'LL NEVER
GET TO HIM IN
TIME!

CARLOS!

BUT THAT'S
NOT WHAT WE
CAME FOR,
CARLOS.

CAME T'WASTE
YOUR SORRY BUTT,
AN' ALL THE BIG
RED MONSTERS
INNA MEXICO
AIN'T GONNA
SAVE YOU
NOW!

NAW, MAN--
DON'T... DON'T...
I DON'T WANNA
DIE...

YOU
BROUGHT
THIS DOWN ON
YOUR BROTHER
PHARAOH.

DEACON
TRUSTED YOU
WITH THAT COKE...
NOW YOU FIN' OUT
WHAT THE GANGSTAS
DO TO THOSE
THAT BETRAY...

ENOUGH!
HOW MANY KIDS
HAVE TO DIE
TODAY?!

LADY
CAME CUTTA
THE SKY--
LIKE SHE
C'DY OR
SOMETHING!

SAVED
MY
LIFE!

NO ONE
CAN WIN
HERE--
FAST
DEATH!!

THIS IS
INSANITY!!

WELL THEN, IT'S
TIME YOU MET
DEATH, BABY!

I'M
NEEDY'S
"BABY"--AND
DON'T YOU
FORGET
IT!

C'MON, BLISS, WHILE
THE OTHERS HANDLE
THE GUNS--

--I NEED TO ATTACK THE
HEADMAN--THE ONE
THEY CALL DEAGON!

THEY SAY
BEHIND EVERY GREAT MAN...
IS A LOT OF WHORE. SO WHAT?
DO YOU FEAR MOST, DEAGON?

COCAINE
HAS MADE THESE
YOUNGSTERS OUR
SLAVES--WE MUST
NOT BE AFRAID TO
USE THE WHIP!

THESE PHAROS
MUST BE TAUGHT
A LESSON...OR
PERHAPS YOU, IN
THEIR PLACE.

DEAGON'S
DRAG-RUNNING
BOSS... IS
MADAME
WIDE?

I'LL... I'LL TAKE
CARE OF IT.
MADAME WIDE, I'LL
WIPE THE WHOLE
GANG IF I HAVE TO...

"WHAT HAVE WE
GOTTEN OUR
SELVES INTO?"

CARLOS,
ARE YOU
OKAY,
MAN?

YEAH,
I...HEY...
YOU KNOW
MY NAME?

PLEASE, I
MUST ADVISE
IMMEDIATE
EVACUATION!

I'M GOIN--
BUT I KNOW
YOU, BLADE-
MAN. I
KNOW I DO...

THIS WAY, KID
PEOPLE HAVE
DIED FOR
KNOWING
LESS...

A FOOLISH
SLIP, GEORGE.
YOU'RE GOING
TO BLOW
ALL OUR
SECRETS...

HAH--MY RUSE
WORKED! WE
DID IT AGAIN,
GUYS!

DID
WHAT, BLISS?
STUMBLED INTO
SOMETHING WE
KNEW NOTHING
ABOUT?

AS USUAL?

ONLY THIS
TIME PEOPLE
DIED BECAUSE
OF IT. BECAUSE
OF ME...

WAIT--
WHAT ABOUT
THE DOG,
ECKA?!

M-MAYBE
IF WE SEEK HIM
OUT, WITH HIS
FIFTH POWER OF
CONSCIOUSNESS,
MAYBE HE
COULD...

BRING
THEM BACK
TO LIFE? DEATH
IS DEATH.
BLISS NO MORE,
AND NEVER
ANY LESS...

THERE'S NO
DOUBT-- THAT'S
MADAME WOE I
READ IN HIS
DREAM--IN BOSS
OF THE
UNDERGROUND!

SHE'S THE
KEY TO HOW
THIS
STARTED--

--IT'S ONLY
FAIR I USE
MY DREAM-
DISGUISE TO
HELP HER
END IT!

Mmm...
DEADON!
YOU'VE
SERVED OUR
CAUSE
WELL! NOW
WU, DESSON
FROM
HERE!

WHA--MADAME WOE?! BUT
WHAT ABOUT THESE
CREATURES? THEY--

Um, LEAVE
THESE THINGS
TO ME. NOW
GO!



HEY, YOU GOTTA
LOOK AT THE BIG
PICTURE, ARMATA.

WHEN HE PASSED
THE QHO POWERS
ON TO US,
ESCHBACHER
SAID WE HAD TO
FIGHT TO PRESERVE
OUR WORLD.

MY TIP ON THIS MEET
SAVED A LOT MORE
LIVES THESE KILLERS
WOULD'VE TAKEN.
THE PHAROCHS
DESERVED A
SECOND CHANCE.



SO DID
THESE
GUYS...



NO MATTER
WHAT WE DO
WITH OUR
POWERS,
IT'S NEVER
ENOUGH...



ARMATA, WE CAN'T
CHANGE THE WORLD
OVERNIGHT!

WE MAY NEVER
BE ABLE TO
CHANGE IT
COMPLETELY
AT ALL...



THEN
WHAT RIGHT
DO WE HAVE
TO KEEP
THESE
POWERS?!

KANRECH!

CHOO!!!

"BEFORE HE DIED,
ESCHBACHER SAID
THE POWERS WERE
HIS..."

"THERMAKK SAID HE
NEEDED THE POWERS
TO PROTECT OTHER
WORLDS, OTHER
GALAXIES, FROM AN
INTERGALACTIC WAR!"

"...THAT HE'D CHOSEN
M--KIS TO CARRY ON
THE PAXIS LEGACY,
AGAINST THE MONSTER--
THERMAKK-- WHO
WANTED TO STEAL
THEM."

"WE THOUGHT HE WAS
LYING--BUT EVERY SOURCE
WE'VE UNCOVERED SINCE
HAS TOLD THE SAME STORY."

YEAH,
YEAH, WE
KNOW...OF
THERMAKK
COMING TO EARTH..."

"...CREATING
THE PAXIS TO
FIGHT AGAINST
TWO WARRING
ALIEN RACES,
high high
high."

TRES
NORMAN
ROCKWELL.
BLISS. THIS IS
ALL A BIG
Joke TO YOU,
MUM ?

PLEASE, ARMATA. WE'RE
ALL AWARE THE PAXIS
DROVE THE WARRING
ALIENS FROM OUR
WORLD, BEFORE THEY
WERE DESTROYED
THEMSELVES--

--AND ALL MEMORY OF THEM
ERASED. BUT THAT'S NOT
WHAT BOTHERS YOU.

YOU FEAR IF WHAT WE'VE
LEARNED IS TRUE, THAT
ESCHBACHER'S RESPO--
BILITY WAS TO RETURN
THE POWERS!

AND THAT EVERY SECOND
WE KEEP THEM, ANOTHER
WORLD IS DYING UNDER
THE HEEL OF THAT WAR
MACHINE!

MAYBE IT DID
BOTHER ME, BUT
NO MORE. I'VE
MADE UP MY
MIND.

WE'RE
GIVING THE
POWERS
BACK!

NO!

OMIGOD!

RELAX--I USED THE
FLAT OF MY BLADE TO
KNOCK 'EM BACK!

I KNOW HOW TO
USE MY POWER...

...IT'S ALL
OF YOU WHO
DON'T GET IT!

YOU THOUGHT
YOU'D GET SOME
COOL ARMOR AND A
BIG GUN, BECOME
A GENIUS
OVERNIGHT...

...AND SUDDENLY
EVERY PERSON ON
THE PLANET BE
HAPPY?!

SHWAK

I GOT NEWS
FOR YOU--THE PAXIS
BATTLED THEIR WHOLE
LIVES FOR CHANGE,
AND ANOTHER GENERATION
OF HEROES'LL DO
BATTLE AFTER US!

ALL WE CAN HOPE
TO DO IS OUR PART!
AND THAT'S
ENOUGH!

IS IT IN THE FACE OF
OTHER WORLDS, OTHER
RACES BEING DESTROYED?

MAN, LOOK
AROUND, LOOK!
YOU THINK OUR
OWN PLANET AIN'T
GOIN' TO HELL IN
A HANDBASKET?

AMOKK,
YOU'RE JUST
LIKE BESCHMEIDER--
AFRAID TO BE YOUR-
SELF, ONE LITTLE
MAN WITHOUT THE
BULLETPROOF
BLADES, FACING
THOSE PROBLEMS!

WE HAVE
PROBLEMS...

YOU'RE
ONE TO TALK,
ALWAYS TELLING
US WHAT TO DO,
ACTING AS IF
THESE'RE YOUR
POWERS!

AND I
DON'T NEED
ANY OF
YOU!

I DON'T
NEED YOUR
PERMISSION
TO KEEP
WHAT'S
MINE!

FAITHFUL HEADQUARTERS
WHERE AMBERTRANCE
PASA, ONE OF THE
ORIGINAL PRINCS, AWAITS
A REVELATION...

BACK FOR
ANOTHER
PRACTICE
SESSION
SO SOON?

MORE
THAN THAT,
AMBER-
TRANCE.

WE--WE'VE
DISCUSSED
IT AMONG
OURSELVES
AND, WELL...

WE THREE HAVE
SOMETHING TO
SHOW YOU...

FOR
BETTER OR
WORSE, IT'S
TIME YOU
KNEW THE
TRUTH...

...OUR
TRUTH!

YOUR
HUMAN
IDENTITIES?

YOU'VE
STILL
PRESERVED
THEM?!

I'M LISA
MOFFIT. ESCHBACHER
GAVE ME THE KEY--
THE DAY LOGIX SHOWED
HIS SMARTS BY
DUMPING ME FOR THE
MISFIT HERE...

LOGIX
DIDN'T DO IT!
IT WAS ME, KENNY
ZAMBETTI. I
NEEDED TIME TO
LEARN WHO I
WAS. I--I'M
NOT A HIGH
SCHOOL JOCK
ANYMORE.

AND I'M NO
MISFIT! AT LEAST
NOT THE WAY YOU
MEAN, LISA! I--WELL,
I CALL MYSELF DYAN
DIVINE. I DANCE AT
THE UNDERGROUND...

BUT WE'VE GOT
BIGGER
PROBLEMS TO
SOLVE RIGHT
NOW!

WE'VE
GOT TO
DECIDE,
AMBER-
TRANCE...

...DOES
OUR PLANET
NEED THESE
POWERS...

--OR DO WE
GIVE THEM
BACK TO
THERMAKK?

WELCOME
LISA...KENNY...
DYAN...

...YOUR
QUESTION
IS A
COURAGEOUS
ONE...



THOSE
STRANGE BLACK
BLOODS THAT
WE FOUGHT...!
I THOUGHT
THEY WERE
MY FAULT!

NO, CHILD, ALTHOUGH
YOUR POWER MAKES
THEM VISIBLE...
THEY'RE PUS FROM
A WOUND OF THE
SOUL...

ALMOST
EVERY HUMAN
ON EARTH IS
LOOKING TO
FULFILL A
NEED...

THERE IS MUCH
AT STAKE HERE--
AND YOU KNOW OUR
WORLD HAS GREAT
NEED OF THE QVO
POWERS...

...FOR PARAGON
JOHN HAS COMMITTED
A HORRIBLE ATROCITY
AGAINST THE SOULS
OF ALL MANKIND!

IN HIS PATHETIC
ANGER AND JEALOUSY,
PARAGON JOHN USED HIS
GENIUS TO BLOT OUT THE
TRUTH. IF HE COULD NOT
BE PAXIS, HE RESOLVED
TO WIPE OUT THE
MEMORY OF ALL
SUPER HEROES!

HIS HYPNOTIC DRUG
ZOM-- COMBINED
WITH A REVERSED HISTORY
BEAMED OVER THE AIR-
WAVES -- LEFT A HOLE,
A Gaping WOUND IN
MEN'S SOULS...

THE TRAGIC
EFFECTS OF THAT
DIABOLICAL PLOT
ARE ALL AROUND
US TODAY...

--THEY'RE
LOOKING
FOR THE
TRUTH, A
LOCAL
VIEW OF REALITY!

YES, IN A WAY...
BUT, FINDING ONLY
A REALITY CONSTRUCTED
BY THE PARAGON
MEDIA EMPIRE, THEY
TURN TO DESPERATE
TREASURES...

PERHAPS
NOT...

...BUT HE
DOES INCREASE
THEM, AND FEED
ON THE RESULTS!
ONLY WE FAITHFUL
ARE LEFT TO
FIGHT FOR TRUTH...

SURELY
JOHN CAN'T
BE RESPONSIBLE
FOR ALL MAN-
KIND'S PROBLEMS!

BUT YOU NEED
OUR HELP TO DO
THAT, DON'T YOU?

YOU THINK
WE NEED TO
STAY HERE AND
FIGHT--TO HELP
PEOPLE
RECOVER
THEIR TRUE
HISTORY, TO
HEAL THEIR
WOUNDS...?

"WHAT I THINK,
CHILD, IS THAT YOU
ARE A WONDERFUL
WAY TO SHOW THE
TRUTH--TO REVEAL
THE LIES OF
PARAGON JOHN..."

"...BUT AS YOU NOW
REALIZE, THERE
ARE OTHER
CONSIDERATIONS..."

"DON'T YOU
SEE, LISA? I'VE
ALWAYS WANTED TO
CHANGE THINGS --
TO DO GOOD!"

"AND I WANT TO DO
IT WITH
YOU!"

"BUT NOW YOU
THINK I DON'T CARE
'BOUT
NOTHIN'..."

"SOMEONE'S
HERE--A
GANGSTAZ?"

"GOT TO
TRANS..."

"SURE--THE
POWERS
ARE FUN!"

"BUT THERE'S
MORE TO IT THAN
THAT--SO MUCH
MORE!"

"WHOA,
BIG
FELLA!"

"IT'S ME,
CARLOS--
YOUR
HOMBRE!"

FWASH

KA-BOOM

SO--WHY'S
UP?

YOU CAN
PUT IT
RIGHT NOW.
GEORGE--I
KNOW...

WHAT DO
YOU MEAN?
KNOW WHAT?

C'MON, GEORGE--I SAW
THAT BLADES DUDE! I
KNOW YOU DON'T JUST
COLLECT COMIC BOOKS--YOU
ARE ONE, MAN! STRANGE
VISITOR FROM ANOTHER
PLANET AND ALL THAT JIVE!

CARLOS--IT'S
SO MUCH MORE
COMPLICATED
THAN THAT!
YOU'VE GOTTA
SWEAR...SWEAR
YOU'LL NEVER
TELL ANYONE
WHAT YOU KNOW.
NOT A SOUL...

I PROMISE! I MEAN,
WHAT SORT OF FRIEND
AM I RIGHT? BESIDES,
YOU'RE THE LUCKIEST
DUDE ON THE PLANET!

MAN, WE'RE
ON EASY STREET,
NOW! ONE BANK
JOB, AND WE CAN
PAY BACK DEACON,
GET HIM OFF
OUR BACKS--

YOU JUST
RANT GET IT,
DO YOU?!

YOU CAN'T JUST
ACT THE THING ALL
YOUR LIFE--RUNNIN'
WITH GAMES, PULLIN'
PETTY CRIMES! TWO
KIDS DIED TODAY--

--ONE OF THESE
DAYS YOU'RE GONNA
HAPTA TAKE RESPONSIBILITY
FOR YOUR LIFE--OR YOU'LL
BE THE NEXT CORPSE IN
THE STREET!

I--I
GET IT,
OKAY?!

THAT LIFE'S
NOT FOR ME,
MAN! THESE ARE
SERIOUS POWERS--
AND IT'S UP TIME
T'USE 'EM T'MAKE
THINGS BETTER!

OKAY!
WHAT-
EVER.

I'M JUST AS RESPONSIBLE AS
THEY ARE--AND I'M GONNA
MAKE LISA REALIZE IT IF IT'S
THE LAST THING I DO!



THE THREAT POSED BY THE ANUBISTI AND
HOKUSIANS IS VERY REAL... HERE --WE
SHOW THESE FILMS IN OUR ANTI-
BRAINWASHING SESSIONS... PART OF
THE FAITHFUL'S MISSION TO RESTORE
THE TRUTH OF EARTH'S HISTORY.

"THESE PICTURES
WERE TAKEN IN
WORLD WAR ONE..."

"...WHEN THE WARRING
ALIENS THREATENED TO
DECIMATE THE POPULATION
OF EUROPE."

"THIS IS THE THREAT THE
QAO CREATED THE FAXIS
TO FIGHT. NEARLY A
CENTURY AGO, FAXIS
RESTORED PEACE BY
FORCING THE HORDES
OFF THIS WORLD."

"BUT THE
WAR DIDN'T
END."

"IN RECENT MONTHS,
THEY'VE FOUND ANOTHER
WORLD TO SERVE AS
THEIR BATTLEFIELD."

"THESE IMAGES WERE
BEAMED HERE FROM
SIGMUS D IN THE
ORION SYSTEM."

"THEY ARE
WHAT
SPARKED
THERMAKK'S
DEMAND
FOR THE
POWERS!"

"TH-THAT'S
HAPPENING
...NOW?"

"HORRENDOUS! BUT JUST
WHERE DID AMBERSTRANE
GET THESE VIDEOS...?"

"A WHOLE SPECIES
DIE FOR
EXTINCTION,
UNLESS THE QAO POWERS
CAN STOP
THEM!"

"WE DON'T
REALLY
HAVE A
CHOICE,
DO WE?"

"IT'S
ALL
OVER..."

"YEAH,
I GUESS
IT IS. LET'S
LET IT
SLIDE,
OKAY?"

... I MEAN, I'M SORRY I BLEW UP LIKE THAT. IT'S JUST I FELT LIKE YOU WERE TELLIN' ME I HAD TO GIVE THE POWERS UP!

YOU'VE...YOU'VE GOTTA UNDERSTAND THAT--

GEORGE, DIDN'T YOU SEE?

I JUST GOT HERE, MAN...

IT DOESN'T MATTER. WE DON'T HAVE A CHOICE ANY LONGER, GEORGE. WE'VE GOT TO SURRENDER THE POWERS.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT SHE'S BEEN FEEDING YOU--BUT WE DON'T GOTTA DO NOTHIN'!

YOU COULD HAVE IT ALL, KENNY-- EVERYTHING I'VE EVER WANTED--BUT YOU JUST KEEP THROWING IT AWAY! WELL, LEAVE ME OUT OF IT!

BUT YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT WE DO, GEORGE--

I KNOW THIS TOWN IS NO SORT OF PLACE FOR MY FAMILY--MY FRIENDS--I TRY AND LIVE IN.

AND I KNOW I GOT THE POWER TO CHANGE THAT!

PLEASE, LISA-- YOU UNDERSTAND...

GROW UP, GEORGE. KENNY'S RIGHT!

YEAH, KENNY'S ALWAYS RIGHT!



WELL
NONE A' YOU
KNOWS JACK
ABOUT BEIN'
HEROES! YOU'RE
ALL COWARDS!
QUITTERS!

YOU JUST
DON'T HAVE
THE HEART
FOR THE
JOB.

GEORGE--
LISTEN TO
REASON!

KEY UP,
KIDS--

--CAUSE
WE'VE GOT ONE
PEEVED-OFF
SUPER HERO
WANNABE!

UNGH!

SLAMASH!

"HULK SMASH!"
IS THAT ALL YOU
CAN THINK ABOUT,
GEORGE F.?

THE
WORLD
ISN'T A
COMIC
BOOK!

BLISS, YOU
MAY PULL BOGUS
IMAGES OUTTA
MY DREAMS--BUT
YOU AIN'T GOT A
CLUE WHAT THEY
REALLY ARE.

DYAN! I
FORGOT!
WHEN I RIP
THROUGH
YOUR DREAM
PROTECTIONS...

AAAGHH!

STOP! THE
FEEDBACK!
I CAN'T
HOLD--

OH...

...I DIDN'T
MEAN...IT'S
JUST--WHY
WON'T ANYONE
LISTEN TO ME?

AMOKK--PLEASE,
JUST WATCH
THE SCREEN!

GEORGE...
FRIEND...
PLEASE...



THE WAR IN OUR
STREETS IS
CONTAINED...IT'S
NOT OVER-- NOT
BY A LONG SHOT...

NO SPT.
SHERLOCK.

... BUT HOW CAN
IT COMPARE...

...TO
THIS?!



THE FOOTAGE
IS FROM SIGMUS D
IN THE ORION
SYSTEM. YESTERDAY'S
NEWS...

AND WHO
WAS THE
NEWSPAPER
BOY?

ANY
LIZARD
GUY WE'VE
HEARD OF?

YES, THE
IMAGES WERE
SENT TO THERMAK'S
SHIP FROM THE
GUY WHO MONITOR
THE WAR.

THEN HOW CAN Y'VE
TRUST THEM?!!
PICTURES LIE
THESE DAYS, YOU
KNOW!

I KNOW MANDAMUS
THERMAK TO BE A
CREATURE OF
HONOR, CHILD.

BUT YOU'LL HAVE TO
DECIDE THE TRUTH
ON YOUR OWN. TO DO
THAT YOU MUST
RESOLVE YOUR
DIFFERENCES WITH
THERMAK.

AND I
SHALL HELP
YOU FIND
HIM...

WHILE, IN AN
EAST L.A.
BACK ALLEY...

I CAN'T
BELIEVE YOU'D
DIS YOUR BUDDY
CHUCKS LIKE THAT,
GEORGE. I'D
NEVER TELL
ANYBODY YOUR
SECRET!

YOU'N' ME --
WE'VE BEEN
THROUGH SO
MUCH STUFF...
SAVED EACH
OTHER'S BUTS...

...AND NOW
YOU THINKIN'
I'M NOTHIN'
BUT STREET
TRASH!

I'M A
SURVIVOR--
THAT'S ALL.

AN' WITH THE DEACON
AN' HIS BOY OUT TO SHAKE
ME, I'LL NEED EVERY
EDGE I CAN...

EASY, CARLOS-- I
KNOW I'VE MISJUDGED
YOU. I BLAMED YOU
FOR WHAT WENT
DOWN WITH THAT
COKE DELIVERY--

--BUT NOW I SEEN
THOSE MONSTERS
WITH MY OWN
EYES. I
UNDERSTAND.

THAT THING--
THE ONE WITH BLADES
FOR HANDS-- HE'S THE
ONE WHO SCREWED UP
THAT DELIVERY, ISN'T HE?

WELL, SOMEBODY
OWES ME, CARLOS. IT
CAN BE YOU--OR HIM.
I'LL HAVE MY SATIS-
FACTION... ONE WAY
OR ANOTHER.

Y. YES.

WELL,
YOU ARE
A SURVIVOR,
CARLOS.

WHO...?

DEACON!

NEED
A HAND,
LITTLE
BROTHER?

OF COURSE,
YOU'RE HERE
RIGHT NOW--
AND I DON'T
KNOW HOW TO
FIND THAT
THING AND HIS
FRIENDS.

UNLESS
YOU CAN
TELL ME...

"THERMAKK HAS TAKEN SANCTUARY IN A MONASTERY... CALLED GYANGAZIN."

"THE MONKS AT THE QUD-ARTS MEDITATION CENTER CAN HELP YOU IN YOUR QUEST FOR THERMAKK..."

"...THERMAKK AND THE FABLED PEACE OF QUD..."

WELL, GANG-- THIS IS THE PLACE AMBERTANCE SAID TO START LOOKING...

"STRENGTH AND GRACE... HYPERKIND..."



THAT!





WOW!
SOME KINDA
INTER-
DIMENSIONAL
PORTAL!
COOL.
WONDER
HOW YOU
TURN THIS
SUCKER--

WITH A THOUGHT, THE
HUGE MACHINERY
SPARKS INTO LIFE--

--SUCKING
GEORGE
INTO A
VORTEX!



I'VE GOT
YOU, LEEB--
HOLD ON!

GEORGE! DON'T!
YOU DON'T KNOW
WHERE IT--



I CAN'T--
ANY-MORE--
THAN--YOU'D--
DITCH--
GEORGE!

LET GO, KENNY! WE
COULD ALL GET SUCKED
OUT INTO THE SKY
OR SOMETHING!

BUT--I--
CAN'T--HOLD--
ON!

T. THAT'S
IT. THE PORTAL'S
CLOSED--HE'S
GONE. I LOST
HIM.

BUT I GOT A
GLIMMER OF
SOMETHING--AN
ICY WIND, A
MOUNTAIN--ON
THE OTHER
SIDE!

SO WE'VE GOT
TO TRANSFORM AND
GO AFTER HIM.



YOU'RE
THE BOSS
LADY--

WHOA
TRIGGER! M-MY
BODY! I'M DOIN'
A REED
RICHARDS!



"WELL, GEORGE IS
ENOUGH TO MAKE
ME QUIT UNDER
MANAGEMENT..."

SO THIS IS
SCENIC MT.
KONDR, HUH?
WISH I'D BROUGHT
MY MITTENS...



C'MON,
GANG! DON'T
JUST LEAVE
ME HERE!

THE MONKS'
INFORMATION
WAS CORRECT--
THERE IS A
COMPLEX
STRUCTURE AT
A HIGHER
ALTITUDE...



JUST A HOP,
SKIP AND A JUMP--
IF YOU'RE A
TELEPORTING
GODZILLA FROM
OUTER SPACE, LIKE
THERMAKK!

WE'LL HAVE TO CLIMB
IT--AND ANTICIPATE
OUR POWER FORMS
CAN PROTECT US FROM
THE EXPOSURE.



THANKS
A LOT,
GEORGE.

WE'LL MAKE
IT. WE'RE
HYPERKIND!



YEAH, BUT
THERMAKK'S
OUR ONLY WAY
OUT OF THIS
PLACE...



DON'T
REMIND
ME...

MT. KENDRICK'S
EMBASSY IS A
CORREL ONE...

...BUT AMBERTRANCE
HAS TAUGHT THE
NEO-PAXIS WELL!

I'M READY WITH
ANOTHER SPIKE!
PLAY OUT SOME
MORE CREAM-
ROPE.

NOT A
BAD TEAM,
HUH
ARMATA?

REASON DICTATES
THAT THIS ROPE IS
ONLY A FIGMENT
OF OUR
IMAGINATIONS...

FIGMENT OR
NOT, I WISH I
COULD HOLD ONTA
SOMETHIN'. STEADY
CLAWIN' MY
WAY UP!

PEHOW

CHOK

IT'S LIKE BEING
ON TOP OF THE
WORLD...

THAT ARMOR
OF YOURS IS
SURPRISINGLY
VERSATILE!

I'M JUST
THAT KIND
OF GIRL...

...WHEN-
EVER YOU
THINK I'VE
REACHED
MY LIMITS,
THERE'S
SOMETHING
NEW...

MOO!
LIKE
THROUGH
A GANG
AND
BANK!

YES--AS LONG AS
YOU GET PLENTY OF
REST AND RECHARGE
THOSE LIFE
BATTERIES.

NO SKIS
FOR YOU! AT
THOUGHTSPEED
THERE WON'T BE
TIME FOR YOU TO
SINK INTO THE
SNOW.

BLISS, YOU'RE SHIVERING!
TOO BAD I CAN'T REMOVE
THIS GAZE--IT'S LIKE,
PART OF ME...

MY
POWER
PROTECTS
ME MOSTLY...
BUT...

...I GUESS
MY POWER'S
DESIGNED FOR
L.A.--THE WIND--
IT BLOWS RIGHT
THROUGH ME.

THANKS,
KENNY... I...

SHE--SHE
REALLY IS
CHANGING.

WE
ALL
ARE...



A PASS IN THE
ROCK! WE'RE
ALMOST
THERE...

"...TO OYANGAZIN..."

BY THE
GODDESS!

SO
BEAUTIFUL...
LIKE SOMETHING
FROM A
DREAM...

A
NIGHTMARE
YOU MEAN! THE
KING 'A THIS
CASTLE WANTS
US FOR
DINNER!

A THERMAL ROCKET--
CREATED BY AN
UNDERGROUND SPRING
OVER SOME KING
MAGMA SOURCE...

LET'S GO
FIND
THE TRUTH!

SO WE'RE
REALLY
INVISIBLE?

AMBERTRANCE
SAYS IT'S MORE LIKE
CAMOUFLAGE... I PROJECT
A DREAM-IMAGE OF WHAT
EVER'S AROUND US,
OVER OUR SKIN.

DOWN
THERE! SOME
KIND OF RITUAL
CEREMONY...

...WITH
THERMAK
AT CENTER-
STAGE!

Silence...

...let the
peace of my
people, the QWO...
take root in your
hearts...your
minds...

...in order
to embrace
that which...

...is not...

THIEVES!
HERE!

DANG!
HE'S
SPOTTED
US!

GOBS--I
FORGOT TO
HIDE OUR
SHADOWS!

...YOU
CHILDREN...

...YOU
DARE TO
DISTURB
MY REST?!

I HAD
HOPED TO
FIND SOME
PEACE BEFORE
WE MET
AGAIN...

BUT IF
YOU SEEK
RENEWED
BATTLE, SO
SOON...

SO BE
IT!

WAIT!
YOU DON'T
UNDERST--

YAAAA!

KERKRAH



GUESS WHO?

BAH!
YOU'VE STILL
NO FORM OF
MASTERY
OVER YOUR
POWERS...
I...



HAH! YOU
SEEM TO FLEE?
FAR TOO LATE,
WHELPS...



HE FELL
FOR IT!

GOT TO
HOLD THIS
DREAM-SCREEN
WHILE THE
OTHERS REGROUP!
LONG ENOUGH
TO GET HIM TO...

SCORE
ONE FOR
BLISS
BABY!

W
A
N
N

ROWR!

NO! YOU
BLINDED ME
WITH YOUR POWER--
JUST AN INCH
BEFORE MY
FACE!

AND DROVE YOU
RIGHT INTO THE
WALL! LIES'LL DO
THAT--THAT'S WHY
WE'RE HERE TO GET
THE TRUTH, THERMAXX!



AND THE
TRUTH IS--
YOU'RE A
DECEITFUL,
MANIPULATIVE,
ALIEN DEATH-
DEALER!

TELL
'EM! TELL
'EM!

HANG ON TO
HIM, AMOKK!
IF YOU'RE
HOLDING ON,
HE CAN'T
TELEPORT
AWAY FROM
YOU!





YOU CAN HOLD ME IN THIS SHAPE, BUT MY OTHER FORMS WILL NOT BE CAPTURED SO EASILY!



AND THAT'S THE EVENTUALITY I'M PREPARING FOR!

GOT TO STRETCH MY CAPE... INTO A MONO-FILAMENT THIN STREAM OF DIGITAL DATA.



COMPUTING LOOP SUBROUTINE--ONE THOUSAND ITERATIONS!

MORPH TO A LARGER SIZE NOW, THERMAK-- AND PREPARE TO BE CUT INTO RIBBONS!



NO! HOW HAVE YOU MASTERED THE POWERS IN ONLY TWO FORTNIGHTS?!

THANKS A LOT, PAL. COULDN'T WE HAVE LEFT ME OUTTA THIS?



LOOK--WE JUST WANT TO TALK WITH YOU. WE'VE BEEN DOING SOME THINKING...



THEY'VE BEEN DOIN' SOME THINKING! I'VE ALREADY FIGURED YOU FOR A STINKIN' LIAR!



WELL, THERMAK CAN'T HIDE THE TRUTH--

--FROM ME!

MANDAMUS
THERMAK--
THIS IS YOUR
LIFE!

WITH A MOTION,
ALL OF THERMAK'S
DREAMS--

--AND NIGHTMARES
OF HISTORY ARE
OPENED, PROTECTED
FOR ALL TO SEE.

YOUR
PESTINY
IS AT
HAND...

NO.
WAIT--I
DON'T
WANT--

THE
HORUSIANS AND
ANUBISTI THREATEN
THE MILLENNIA
LONG PEACE OF
THE QUD!

TO CONTROL
THIS, YOU'VE BEEN
CHOSEN TO HOUSE THE
VIOLENT IMPULSES OF
OF YOUR PEOPLE...

...VESSEL
FOR THOSE
DARK URGES
FOREVER
REFLECTED BY
OUR KIND!

YOU WILL
EMPOWER OTHERS
TO PROTECT THE
INNOCENTS OF
THEIR WORLDS.

... WHILE NEVER HINDERING
THE WAR. FOR THIS WE DICTATE:
THE WAR MUST NOT END!

"IN EXILE, UNDER PENALTY OF DEATH,
YOU MUST FIGHT AS OUR LONE
WARRIOR--TO PRESERVE THE UNIVERSE!"

THEY SENT
YOU TO
DO THEIR
DIRTY
WORK--

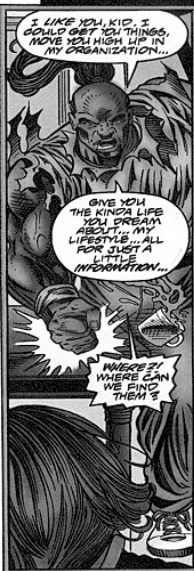
THAT'S HARSH! BUT NOT
OUR RESPONSIBILITY!
KEEPING A WAR GOING
IS A LOUSY USE OF
THESE POWERS!

BUT WHAT OF THE INNOCENT
LIVES AT STAKE?

--BUT WOULDN'T
LET YOU END
THE WAR?!

WHY?!

IS THAT ALSO
"NOT YOUR
RESPONSIBILITY?"



"ONE OF THESE
DAYS YOU'RE
GONNA HAPTA TAKE
RESPONSIBILITY
FOR YOUR LIFE"...

--WASN'T THAT
WHAT I TOLD
CARLOS ?

NO, I CAN'T
JUSTIFY KEEPING
THE POWERS
BUT CAN YOU
JUSTIFY KILLING
ESCHBACHER ?

HE ONLY
WANTED TO DO
GOOD--SAME
AS US!

THE POSSESSOR OF
UNIVERSAL CONSCIOUSNESS,
THE FIFTH POWER ?

THEN
PERHAPS
YOU NEED TO
SPEAK WITH
ESCHBACHER
HIMSELF.
WILL THAT
EASE YOUR
MIND... ?

WASH

THE
SAME.

ECKA!

I'VE BEEN
OBSERVING
YOU FOR
WEEKS
THERMAK.

I SEE
THE JUSTICE
OF YOUR
MISSION,
AND THE
FOLLY.

HE--HE'S
FREEDING
US!

A PART OF
ESCHBACHER
STILL RESIDES IN
THE PAXIS COMPUTER.
THERE LIES THE
NEXT STEP IN
BOTH YOUR
JOURNEYS.

THIS IS
NOT A SMALL
DECISION. THE
BALANCE OF WHOLE
WORLDS ARE AT
STAKE HERE--MORE
THAN ANY OF YOU
REALIZE...

"...THESE FOUR YOUNG
HUMANS MUST CHOOSE
THEIR OWN WAY.
THERMAK...MAKE
THEIR OWN DESTINY."

"PREPARE YOUR SHIP,
THERMAK. WE RETURN
...TO THE SARCOPHAGUS."

THE FAXIS LABORATORY,
HIDDEN WITHIN THE
HOLLYWOOD CINEMA
ON HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD...

WITHIN
THESE FIVE
SARCOPHAGI
ARE YOUR
FATES.

DEEP
INSIDE THE
COMPUTER
SARCOPHAGUS'S
SPIRIT NOW REIGNS.
GIVE HIM MY LOVE.

WUT WHAT ABOUT
YOU? AREN'T YOU
GOIN' IN WITH US?

MY
GIFT OF COSMIC
CONSCIOUSNESS
ALLOWS ME TO RELEASE
MY POWERS AT
WILL.

I WILL
STAND GUARD
OVER YOU--AND
INSURE THAT THE
DECISION RESTS
IN YOUR HANDS--

--NOT
HIS...

I ALREADY KNOW
WHAT I'LL DECIDE.

I'M NOT
GIVIN' UP...

WILL--WILL
YOU ALL STILL
BE MY FRIENDS...
IF WE'RE NOT
A TEAM
ANYMORE?

WE'VE
BEEN THROUGH
A LOT TOGETHER,
BLISS. I THINK
WE'LL HANG IN
THROUGH A LOT
MORE.

...WHILE I STILL
HAVE THE BESTIAL
COURAGE...

DON'T BUY INTO
IT, BLISS--
ESCHBACHER'LL
CONVINCE YOU,
I KNOW!

BUT JUST IN
CASE...THERE'S
SOMETHIN'
I GOTTA DO...

WE ALWAYS
TRIED TO DO THE
RIGHT THING,
YOU KNOW...

...BUT YOU,
THERMACK--
YOU'RE
HEARTLESS.



I SENSE...
MY ENEMY!

THERMAK--
FATHER, KILLER,
BEAST-- WHY HAVE
YOU COME HERE, TO
MY SANCTUARY?

AH-- BUT YOU
WOULD NOT DARE
INVADE THE PAKIS
CYBER-DOMAIN...

...FOR HERE
ESCHBACHER
RULES
SUPREME!

A-- ARE
WE DEAD?
IS THIS
HEAVEN?

NOT QUITE. THIS
IS SOME KIND
OF DATA-WORLD--
BUT NOT IN
BINARY CODE!

YOUR
SCANS-- LOGIX,
CAN YOU TELL
WHERE THESE
BLOWING
WIRES
LEAD?

DON'T
LOOK NOW--
BUT HERE
COMES YOUR
ANSWER!



WELCOME,
HYPERKINE, TO
MY CYBER-REALM...

...WHERE
WILL FORMS
MY CIRCUITS--
AND GROWS MY
ELECTRICITY!



E-ESCHBACHER--
WE NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT THE POWERS.
WERE THEY YOURS.
WERE THEY YOURS
TO GIVE OR DID
YOU--

--STEAL
THEM...?

DON'T
GET HIM!
ANGRY!

WE NEED TO KNOW...
IS IT TRUE? DID YOU
TAKE THESE POWERS
AWAY FROM THE
GUD?



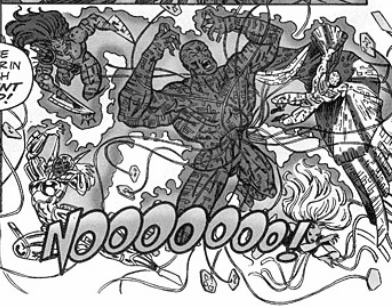
THERMAK CLAIMED
OTHER WORLDS
MIGHT PERISH WITH-
OUT THEM-- BUT
WHAT MATTER?

HUMANITY MUST
TAKE PRECEDENCE
OVER ALIEN FILTH!
SUCH IS OUR
DESTINY!



THE
GUD NEVER
UNDERSTOOD
THE PROPER
USE OF THEIR
GREATNESS!
THEIR FEARS
IS A LIE!

BUT NOW THAT YOU CAN
VISIT ME HERE, WE CAN
PROPERLY BEGIN YOUR
TRAINING-- YOU WILL LEARN
THE TRUTHS ONLY I CAN
GIVE!





I AM
LORD
HERE---

--AND IF YOU
CHILDREN
WILL NOT
SERVE YOUR
MASTER---

...THEN I
SHALL STRIP
THE QAO POWERS
FROM YOU---

-- AND GIVE
THEM TO MORE...
REASONABLE
ALLIES!

SOME
KIND OF
MASS...
DOWNLOAD...

HAHAHAHA!

THOSE WIRES
BUCKING OUR POWERS
FROM US...

...LOSING
COHERENCE...

HE--HE'S
UNSTOPPABLE!

HE'LL
EAT US
ALIVE!
UNLESS...

RAGH!

SKASH!

THESE
DATA WIRES--
THAT'S HOW
YOU CONTROL
EVERYTHING!
ISN'T IT?!

WELL,
YOU'RE NOT
CONTROLLING
ME!

HEB DONE IT!
HE'S INTERRUPTED
THE POWER FLOW
AND SHORT-CIRCUITED
ESCHBACHER!

OUR POWERS
ARE RETURNING
TO US--THROUGH
HIM!

GEORGE...

GEORGE!

BUT THERE IS NO
ANSWER...AS
THE AXIS
COMPUTER
REACHES--

--OVERLOAD!

POWER!
LIKE I'M
SUPER-
CHARGED!

THESE
NEW SUITS
ARE
STYLIN'!

WE ARE
TRANSFORMED
ANEW--

--BUT WHAT HAS
HAPPENED TO
AMOKK?

I AIN'T
DOWN
FOR THE
COUNT--

--NOW THAT
I CAN
COUNT--

--AT LEAST
TO THREE...

...I'M BACK,
BIGGER AND
Badder
THAN EVER!

BUT THE QUD
MACHINERY...!

DESTROYED!
NOW THE POWERS
CAN NEVER BE
TRANSFERRED!
ALL... ALL IS
LOST!

THE
POWERS
STILL EXIST
IN THE BODIES
OF THE
HYPERKIND.

SURELY
THE QUD CAN
CREATE NEW
EQUIPMENT
TO TRANSFER
THEM...

IT'S TOO MUCH
TO ASK. RETURNING
TO QUD WOULD
MEAN THERMAKK'S
DEATH--HE'S FOUGHT
LONG ENOUGH...

NO YOU
CAN'T ASK.
BUT I CAN
OFFER. IF YOU
AGREE TO
THE JOURNEY,
I... WILL
TAKE YOU...

IT'S
NOW OR
NEVER...

LOOK
OUT, EVIL
ALIENS--
'CAUSE
HERE COME
THE
HYPERKIND!

THE THEATRES OF HOLLYWOOD
HAVE SEEN MANY SPECIAL
EFFECTS...

...BUT NONE AS ASTONISHING
AS THAT WHICH NOW LIGHTS
THE SKY ABOVE THE
HELIOFOLIS CINEMA!

YOU CAN'T
RUN, CARLOS--
THAT LITTLE SCENE
WAS JUST A DELAY
TO YOUR HOUR
O' JUDGMENT!

I WANT
TO KNOW...

SO THAT'S THE
ANSWER, THEY'RE
ALIENS-- THAT'S
WHAT YOU WERE
SCARED TO TELL
ME!

BUT THAT
MAKES GEORGE--
MY FAVORITE
MARTIAN? NO...
I DON'T
BELIEVE IT...

MY
QUESTION'S
BEEN ANSWERED
--BUT MY
OFFER STILL
STANDS,
CARLOS...

...MADAME
WEE WANTS
YOUR CORPSE--
WE'VE SOME-
HOW GOT A
GANG WAR
ON OUR
HANDS--

NO THANKS,
DEACON. THERE
ARE OTHER
WORLDS UP
THERE--FLYIN'
SAUCERS,
ALIENS, AND
THAT...

...BUT ALL WE
DO HERE ON THE
GROUND IS
WALLOW IN
MISERY!

--BUT IF YOU
WANT THE EDEN
HOUSE PROJECTS
FOR YOUR TURF,
WE'LL PROTECT
YOU FROM HER.

THEN NO ONE COULD
BUY OR SELL THE
ROCK WITHOUT GOIN'
THROUGH YOU FIRST.
YOU'D BE THE MAN...

I THINK
IT'S TIME I
FOUND MYSELF
SOMETHIN'
BIGGER TO
BELIEVE IN...

WHILE INSIDE...

THOUGH
THEY'LL NOT
UNDERSTAND
MY ACTIONS...

"...I STILL MUST
SEND THEM TO
THEIR GREATER
DESTINY..."

AND
NOW COMES
THE PART IN
THIS DRAMA
THAT ONLY I
CAN PLAY!

SKA WHAM

NO, THE
DOG IS STILL
LOYAL TO
ESCHBACHER!
IT HAS
BETRAYED
US!

THROWN LIGHT YEARS
OFF-COURSE, THE QLO
SHIP APPEARS NOT
AT ITS INTENDED
DESTINATION ON QLO...

"...BUT IN THE WAR-TORN
ORION SYSTEM, INTO
THE HEART OF THE
ANIBIST/HORUSIAN WAR!"

WILL THIS BE THE END
OF THE HYPERKIND?!!
CHECK OUT THE NEXT
HYPERKIND SPECIAL!

IN THE MEANTIME,
SEND YOUR LETTERS
AND COMMENTS TO:

HYPERKIND
96 MARVEL COMICS
387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH
NEW YORK, NY 10016
or e-mail to
fburke @ccnet.
com

For Don Thompson...who made
the world safe for heroes.

"Ritual"

BY FRANK LOVECE

He was bleeding.

Trip hadn't expected it. He'd felt the tang of metal against flesh, felt it all the way up his arm like ice-cube ants exploding along its length. But now to see blood that had been safe inside veins and arteries, enclosed and protected, it stunned him, as if he somehow had never seen blood before.

But there it was. Gorkill was bleeding.

Eyes like angry suns, Gorkill leapt, aiming for the weapon in Trip's hand. The weapon—it had no name, it barely had a shape—was a bludgeoning blade, two feet long and heavy as an anvil.

Indigo blood, spurting from Gorkill's mouth, left a trail in the air, seeming to defy gravity, before falling to the dirt. Gorkill moved that fast. But Trip had learned things. Gorkill had taught him. Trip swiftly shifted his weight, leaning back as Gorkill thrust, and swept him off his feet with a clean, sharp kick to the knees. Gorkill, anticipating, rolled harmlessly into the dirt, and swiftly jabbed a foot toward the tender spot between Trip's legs. And Trip, parrying, transformed his weapon into a saucer-sized plate, slicing it through the air with balletic grace to intercept Gorkill's clanging kick.

The afternoon wore on: A human granted power to transform unliving matter, versus an angry alien warrior, two chess pieces in perpetual motion, each avoiding capture by a single jump, again and again, on their way toward the inevitable draw.

But this draw was different. This draw, Trip had reaped first blood.

* * *

July 6:

It's been three days now, but I can't get it out of my mind. Maybe writing it down will help.

I made him bleed.

That's never happened before. The scar is still there on Gorkill's face, where I slashed him. And him, he acts like everything's normal and that's just the way it's done. He thinks he's some kind of drill instructor, like, what, Louis Gossett in "An Officer and a Gentleman." I guess that makes me Richard Gere, but I don't see no Debra Winger here, let alone Cindy Crawford. -

Oh man oh man oh man. They say writing a journal helps you get your head straight. But this feels more like talking to yourself and then leaving behind the proof that you're crazy.

It's been months now since Gorkill and I survived that bloodbath with Bloodshed, the "champion" of the interdimensional war-god, Felon Bale. (I can't believe I'm using words like "interdimensional war-God." I'm a struggling

stand-up comic from New York, The Real World. Inter-dimensional war-gods aren't supposed to exist in The Real World. But hey, of course there should be inter-dimensional war-gods to make my life complicated.)

Things could be worse, I guess. Fighting Bloodshed, I found out what it's like to be heart-dead but not brain-dead (no matter what my critics say).

And I'm finally reconciled to the fact that I'm "Earth's Champion" against Bale's interdimensional horde, the Corpii — who, thank God, can only invade one-at-a-time since they can't just, like, charter a bus here. Hey, I've even got one of them on my side. Gorkill and I may not be exactly friends, but he's okay for a grouchy, cynical, seen-it-all high-tech barbarian with an attitude as bad as his breath.

(Oh, right. Like I should be writing this where he can see it...)

Gorkill, I'll give him credit, has gotten me in the best shape of my life, such as it is. He's taught me some other-dimensional judo-thing that's sort of like The Three Stooges on a sugar rush, and he's gotten me exercising, into weight training, off meat and onto organic foods. I draw the line at coffee, though. Nobody touches my coffee.

This is boot camp, and I'm not looking forward to finishing it. But I've got to. I don't think I'll be able to count on the military or the government or anybody for help against the Corpii. Nobody's taken the few sightings seriously—the Corpii are really good at being discreet and, hey, who believes in little green men from Mars anyway?

I hear Gorkill calling. Time for a nice, leisurely 12-mile run. Then we spar again. Ugh.

I know how far he wants to take this, but I'm not prepared to do what he wants. I may be learning the skills, but not the way a warrior thinks. And I won't. I am not a killer. I'm not going to let him turn me into one.

Besides which, I've pretty much lost my powers anyway.

Thinking without thinking, he transformed the heavy iron anvil in his hands into a smooth, sharp pole that hit the floor, embedding itself into the concrete below the wood.

Oh, yeah—did I mention that?

* * *

The shack belonged to Trip's estranged father, who'd decided to spend the summer tooling around the country with his wife, Jimi, on a Harley-Davidson the size of Ecuador. The place was a white-trash fortress at the end of a dirt road, miles from the nearest red-

neck, hidden by thick strands of fir trees. Nearby the shack stood an old, dilapidated barn and a hog pen and a chicken run, all empty, on 200 acres of weedy nothing.

The barn still held old tools and implements, most of them rusted and useless. Trip had gone exploring in the mildewed husk the day he and Gorkill arrived, searching for the wallboard where, at age six, he'd written his name in black tar, trying to declare a bit of permanence in case his father's beatings ever killed him. Looking for it dazedly in the barn's upper loft, lost in his trip down memory sewer, he didn't notice the rotted floorboard until after his leg had crashed through.

Scrambling, panicking, trying not to fall, Trip pinwheeling his arms for something, anything, to grab onto. The anvil was the closest thing, a worse choice than nothing. Not only did it stop him from crashing through, it fell through with him. Trip would've been amused at the Wile E. Coyote-ness of it all, if it weren't for the fact he was about to be killed.

Thinking without thinking, he transformed the heavy iron anvil in his hands into a smooth, sharp pole that hit the floor, embedding itself into the concrete below the wood. Trip, clutching it, spun round and round, lower and lower, until he safely settled onto the ground, so dizzy he wanted to vomit, but safe. Alive.

He'd shape-shifted the anvil. This was the power given him by Godkin Straith, to use as earth's champion against Felon Bale's invasion. He was supposed to have the power all his life. But when does life end? At cessation of heartbeat? Of brain waves? And for how long? The doctors might jolt you back on the operating table after a second of brain-death, but what about two seconds? Five? Twenty?

Fighting Bloodshed, Trip had died by at least one definition. Most of his power died that day as well. When Trip came jolting back, it did not come back with him.

Changing the anvil took the last of it. In the following sweltering days, he found he could use and re-use that final bit of shape on this one object only, and only then to change its shape, not its mass or composition.

Trip made a mental note not to ever, ever misplace it.

* * *

Sept. 1:

Dad's coming back after Labor Day. Gorkill and I have to be out of here by then. S'okay by me. It's fine. It's time. The money from my TV appearance is almost gone, and I still don't know how I'm going to make a living when I get back home to New York — "Earth's champion" seems to be an unsalaried position.

The training has gotten more intense. There's no time for anything but eat, sleep, train. I go into town once a week for groceries, but otherwise, I haven't seen another human in months.

Sometimes, I don't even feel human myself.

Gorkill keeps pushing me harder and harder. I don't like that I'm liking this. I can't do what he wants me to. I won't.

Still... Gorkill's adapting to Earth mores. He's trying, he really is. He's found a convicted murderer, in a prison not fifty miles from here. The guy's just waiting for execution anyway. Gorkill says our breaking into the prison to snatch him is just...

NO!!!! What am I saying? I AM A HUMAN BEING! I AM NOT A CORP!! I AM FIGHTING THE CORP!!

I'm scared. I want to defend Earth. I want to do what I have to. No one else can, I know that. But why am I doing it if I'm going to become like the very thing I'm fighting against?

Do I have what it takes? Do I have what it takes?

Trip and Gorkill stood in darkness on Labor Day night, the only light coming from an oil lamp in the barn.

The murderer, one Jake Borham, was with them — a killer who'd used his years in prison to pump his body into monstrous proportions, his eyes showing no more remorse than a shark's. The newspapers tomorrow would report his "impossible escape" on this crowded holiday visiting-day at the prison, and unconfirmed stories about two "space aliens" by doubtlessly lying inmates.

He stood at one point of a triangle. At another corner stood Trip, sweating lava, his heart a kettledrum in his ears. And at the final corner stood Gorkill, some alien impossible thing that kept looking more human the more you stared at it.

Borham, the papers had said, had tortured and brutalized an 11-year-old girl, leaving her remains in a ditch. He'd left another girl for dead, her arms and legs broken, but she'd survived and identified him. He'd been tried and found guilty. He was awaiting execution. And now he found himself in gladiatorial combat.

Trip didn't move. The weapon he'd taken to keeping in his hand was absently morphing from one form to another. In his mind, Trip desperately went over the facts one last time. He thought about the dead girl's last moments, how desperately she must have begged Borham not to kill her. An 11-year-old child, powerless against a grown man beating her with piston-like fists until she died.

Trip couldn't think of him as a man. Borham was a monster, an inhuman creature, conscienceless. He had no reason to be alive.

Almost without his willing it, the weapon in Trip's hand became a blade-edged hammer. The man would be dead before he knew it.

Gorkill, the unearthly referee, tossed a loaded, two-barreled shotgun into Borham's hands, then vanished into the shadows. Borham cocked and aimed. He didn't even hesitate.

And neither, to his surprise, did Trip.

* * *

Labor Day:

It's over. I've done what I had to.

For the first time in my life, I know what it is like to kill. I've learned what I was capable of. I know like I know there's ground beneath my feet, I know that I can kill in combat.

But nowhere else. I am a human being. I am not a Corpii. I am fighting the Corpii.

It's funny. After I subdued the guy, I told Gorkill I was taking Borham back to prison. And that if Gorkill tried to stop me, made me try to kill this human, then I would kill him. Gorkill, I mean.

He just looked at me. I don't know what I saw in his eyes — pride? Surprise? I don't know.

All I know is, I've passed my test.



**Gorkill, the unearthly referee,
tossed a loaded, two-barreled
shotgun into Borham's hands,
then vanished into the shadows.
Borham cocked and aimed. He
didn't even hesitate.**